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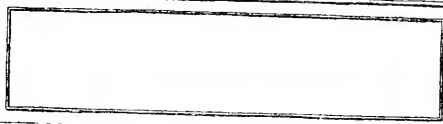
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APERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 8

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# Christian Conduct in War Time

By

W. H. MOBERLY, M.A.

*Price Twopence*

HUMPHREY MILFORD

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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UNIV. OF  
TORONTO

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## EXPLANATORY NOTE

GREAT BRITAIN is engaged in a war from which, as we believe, there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape. The desire of all who love their country is to serve it in the hour of its need, and so to live and labour that those who have fallen in its service may not have died in vain. While this may suffice to make immediate duty clear, the war remains in the deepest sense a challenge to Christian thought. The present bitter struggle between nations which for centuries have borne the Christian name indicates some deep-seated failure to understand the principles of Christ and to apply them to human affairs.

This series of papers embodies an attempt to reach, by common thought, discussion and prayer, a truer understanding of the meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church to the individual, to society and to the world.

Those who are promoting the issue of these papers are drawn from different political parties and different Christian bodies. They believe that the truth they seek can be attained only by providing for a measure of diversity in expression. Therefore they do not accept responsibility for the opinions of any paper taken alone. But in spirit they are united, for they are one in the conviction that in Christ and in His Gospel lies the hope of redemption and health for society and for national life.

## CHRISTIAN CONDUCT IN WAR TIME

*Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God ; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces ; but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered—that of neither has been answered fully.*

*'The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences ; for it must needs be that offences come ; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him ? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily*



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*pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."*

*'With malice toward none ; with charity for all ; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in ; to bind up the nation's wounds ; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.'*

(From Abraham Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1865.)

THE present war has plunged all who would be Christian into difficulty. There are intricate questions of principle to be faced: 'Is war ever justifiable for those who profess the religion of love? And, if so, under what conditions and limitations?' Here there is room for genuine perplexity and difference of opinion, and there are perhaps few of us who do not feel the need of thinking out our principles more thoroughly than ever before. This, however, takes time, and there are immediate duties before us. On these plain duties all Christian men, from the Crusader to the Quaker, can agree. Here, too, there is difficulty, but it is of a different kind: it lies rather in doing than in knowing what is right. Though in some directions the path of Christian duty is hard to discern, in others it is plain and urgent. Loyalty is



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the most conspicuous of all duties just now, and Christians must be loyal to their own flag.

It is to emphasize some of these immediate practical duties that this paper is written.

### CHARITY IN JUDGEMENT

‘Judge not that ye be not judged.’ This is a hard saying, and never more so than in time of war. To suspend judgement, to sift evidence, to see things, even for a moment, through German eyes, seems to require an inhuman and cold-blooded detachment from our own country’s cause just when we least desire to stand aloof. To ask us *now* to adopt the attitude of the impartial historian of the future seems almost a sacrilege.

This feeling is natural, but we cannot acquiesce in it. Loyalty to Christ demands of us a real effort to *think*, and to think calmly ; not that we may feel less, but that we may purge our feeling, so far as may be, of all that is unchristian. That this is possible without any loss of force the example of Lincoln shows.<sup>1</sup> He was the chief actor in a struggle of which the moral issue was the plainest possible. Yet in the midst of the heat and the dust of conflict he could put aside all prejudice and misunderstanding, and view South as well as North with judicial calmness, as in the sight of God. In face of such an example, can we be content with any lower ideal ?

It is a Christian duty to ‘think no evil’ ; not to condemn our neighbour on less than complete evidence ; and, if we must blame, not to adopt a judging attitude, but to think with sorrow rather than condemnation of others’ sins, remembering that we ourselves are sinful men and women.

<sup>1</sup> See the passage from the *Second Inaugural Address* prefixed to this Paper.

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Whatever our sins in practice, we all recognize this duty in principle, so far as our relation to individuals is concerned. We know how much our beliefs about persons, and our interpretation of their doings, are coloured by our wishes. We know how easy it is to believe the worst of them—and how wrong !

But the same is true of our relation with hostile nations and their people. Here, too, we need to be on our guard against the temptation to judge hastily and harshly. In the present war we are under a very special obligation to practise charity. We believe that we see grave defects in the German mind. We see strong prejudice, an unwillingness or inability ever to look at things through the eyes of others, a refusal to credit opponents with sincerity or with any worthy motives at all. We deplore this ; we think it narrow and unjust ; we think it must work great evil to Germany. But the more clearly we seem to see these faults, the more we are bound to avoid imitating them. We cannot help thinking our German neighbours wrong-headed. We dare not think them insincere. For refusal to believe in the goodness of motive of opponents is precisely the fault that we condemn in them.

Whatever, then, we may think of German diplomacy, it is our Christian duty to avoid launching moral accusations against the whole German people. We must try to examine the facts in a Christian spirit, honestly desiring to set aside our natural prejudices, and resolving to prefer a charitable interpretation of German conduct wherever it is reasonably possible. If we do so, it will be clear to us that this war is not, in the eyes of the German people as a whole, consciously aggressive or unrighteous. ‘ Men will not die for causes that do not

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seem right to them,'<sup>1</sup> and, to all appearance, the whole educated German public, including men pre-eminent both in holiness and in mental ability, is honestly convinced that Germany's cause is morally right and our cause morally wrong.

This is, at first sight, a staggering fact. Such a sharp conflict of judgement between two bodies of opinion, both able and honest, certainly shows how fallible is the human mind and how great is the influence of prejudice. When we first realize it, the natural effect is that our confidence in our own judgement is shaken, and we begin to doubt our own power of rising above mere national prejudice. But in spite of this, most of us are still convinced of the justice of our cause, and believe that we can see good grounds for setting aside the German judgement. In this conviction we, as Englishmen, have great cause for thankfulness; but we have still no right to condemn, violently or wholesale, those who differ from us.

In just the same way we must be slow to condemn Germans broadcast for their *methods* of making war. Our newspapers have for weeks been full of stories of atrocities perpetrated by German soldiers, which rouse our horror and our indignation. There is a real danger that they may cause in us a kind of mental and moral collapse. There are certainly some circles in relation to which the description given by Mr. W. W. Greg<sup>2</sup> has much truth. 'Many ordinarily sober and reasonable people,' he writes, 'are for the moment possessed with a spirit of timorous hatred that saps in them all power

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, October 22, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, September 10.

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of rational thought. . . . Every idle tale against an enemy is diligently sought for and believed, just as every rumour favourable to an ally. To be friend or foe is in itself sufficient evidence of the possession of every good and of every evil quality. Abuse of the enemy is taken as the measure of a man's patriotism.' In face of such tales it is our clear duty to use resolute effort to judge as charitably as possible. If we approach the atrocity stories in this spirit, we shall at once remind ourselves of the weakness of all evidence where the witness is excited, of the possibility that one story may have many versions, and of the danger of trusting to half-truths.

Testimony as to things witnessed under conditions of great excitement is notoriously unreliable. It is necessary to make much greater allowance than at other times for the effect of misunderstanding, prejudice, and exaggeration. In the *Hibbert Journal* for October, Lord Roberts expressly warns his countrymen against abuse of the Germans. 'Let us avoid,' he says, 'what Mr. Kipling during the Boer War described as "killing Kruger with your mouth"'. . . . When we read charges against the German troops, let us remember that gross charges, absolutely untrue, were brought against our own brave soldiers fighting in South Africa. But, whether the charges are true or not, let us keep our own hands clean, and let us fight against the Germans in such a way as to earn their liking as well as their respect.'

Of many apparent horrors, such as the burning of Louvain, the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral, and, in many cases, the shooting of civilians, there are two stories. The Germans tell us that Louvain was burnt as a punishment for a preconcerted rising, resulting in

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fighting lasting two days, that Rheims Cathedral was fired on because the French were using the tower as an observation post, that civilians have been shot because the German troops have been 'sniped' from their houses or villages. If their account is true, the guilt of their proceedings is much reduced. It may well not be true, but also it may be not entirely false. Where there are two versions of the same occurrence, their relative truth is a matter for investigation. But we are certainly not thinking Christianly, we are not even behaving with common fairness or charity, if we prejudice such investigation by assuming, for example, that the Antwerp version of the destruction of Louvain, which we heard first, is absolute fact, and that therefore the German version, so far as it differs, must be simple falsehood.

Even if we must hold—as seems probable—that many atrocities have in fact been committed by German soldiers, we must still remember two things. In the first place there is the possibility that they may not have been entirely unprovoked. We sometimes hear our own soldiers exhorted to take vengeance on the Germans for their crimes, and to give no quarter to such treacherous and unworthy foes. That is to say, they are incited to commit what in German eyes would certainly be 'atrocities', though on our side they would be excused as being only the infliction of deserved retribution. It is then only fair to remember that the German papers are full of stories of barbarity inflicted by Belgians on Germans. (We can hardly wonder, indeed, if some Belgians have been driven half insane by the hideous sufferings of their countrymen.) It matters not, for this purpose, whether these stories are well or ill founded. They are believed

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and the belief is probably the cause of many of the 'atrocities' of which we hear. It is true that reprisals in kind can never be justified, whether it is Englishmen, Belgians, or Germans who take them. But they cannot be condemned in precisely the same measure as unprovoked atrocities. Indeed, a large part of the evil of readiness to believe and repeat such stories is that they foment on both sides a spirit of deep anger and desire for vengeance, and make it increasingly difficult for the war to be waged in anything like a Christian spirit.

In the second place we must remember that in every large army there are a number of bad men. In every great war there are a number of evil deeds done. It is a part of the inevitable evil of war that it lets loose strong passions. Many men, not naturally cruel, do terrible things in hot blood. We must not set up for our enemies a standard which condemns our own military history.

Suppose then that it is true that there is in high places a deliberate policy of holding down a conquered population by ruthless severity in the punishment of offences. Suppose that it is true—as is almost certain—that many atrocities have been committed in this war by German soldiers. Suppose, even, that it is true—as seems probable—that the number of such atrocities is much greater than is usual with a civilized army. That would indeed give cause to all decent Germans for shame and penitence. But it gives us no right to say that 'the German nation' or 'the German soldier' is other than an honourable foe.

## SUPPRESSION OF ALL ILL WILL

Most of us have conscientiously convinced ourselves that we are bound, at this moment, to withstand the

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Germans by force. We have thus helped to bring about a 'state of war'; and in a 'state of war' it is very natural for mutual hatred and ill will to grow up. This is why some of our friends hold that it can never be right for a Christian man to promote war. For war is not only a natural effect of evil passions; it almost inevitably fosters and greatly aggravates them. This we are seeing to-day in the growing embitterment of opinion both in Germany and in Great Britain.

If, in spite of this, we are prepared to advocate or support a war, even for the most just of causes, we are taking a great responsibility upon ourselves. We are committed to the view that it is really possible to make war on a people without hating them or wishing them evil. But even if it is possible to make war in this spirit, it is immensely difficult; and we shall have to exert to the very utmost our forces of mind and will if we are to check the natural tendency of war to beget in us 'envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness'. We need to examine ourselves most stringently lest, while professing allegiance to none but Christian principles, we are allowing ourselves to cherish feelings and designs that we could never bring ourselves to submit to the scrutiny of Jesus Christ.

The risk we run of deceiving ourselves in this matter is exceedingly great. We are not consciously dishonest, but insensibly we take up one attitude in theory and quite a different attitude in practice. In theory we say that it is possible to make war without hate: for otherwise we clearly could not, 'in a cool hour', justify our going to war at all. But in practice we acquiesce in pure desire of harm to our enemies, and indeed assume



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tacitly that this is an inevitable incident of a state of war. Now the man who says candidly ‘ Christianity is all very well in time of peace, but it won’t work in war ; so much the worse for Christianity ! ’ is at least consistent : he merits a certain respect. But if we tacitly act upon this principle, yet never clearly acknowledge it even to ourselves, there is little to be said for us. We cannot make the best of both worlds. We cannot serve Christ and Odin.

If we are in earnest with our Christianity, we shall constantly remind ourselves that Christ died for the people of Germany as well as for us ; that He is at this moment—with an intensity which we can very faintly conceive—desiring the good of every single German and of the whole German people ; and that if we are not, to the utmost of our spiritual powers, striving to unite ourselves with His mind and purpose for the German people, we are not even trying to follow Him.

If we bear this in mind, certain practical conclusions seem to follow. We believe that we do right to be at war with the Germans. We must therefore desire their defeat, in whatever completeness may be necessary to a lasting settlement. But we must immediately go further.

We are constantly saying, in our newspapers and elsewhere, that what we are really fighting is not the German people but German militarism. We must try not only to say this, but to mean it. We must always be looking forward to a future in which the German people will be able, with their magnificent mental endowments, to make their distinctive contribution to the Kingdom of God, and in which we shall be able to live in friendly

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intercourse with them. In earthly warfare, at this moment, they are our enemies ; in the unending task of establishing the Kingdom of God that lies before us they are possible allies, with whose help we cannot dispense.

Again, we must resolutely suppress all desire for German suffering or German humiliation. If our statesmen tell us that a lasting peace can be concluded only in Berlin, we can probably trust them. But we must not allow ourselves to look forward to a triumphal entry into Berlin merely as a blow to German pride or a gratification to our own. To gloat over such pictures as ' Ghurkas in the gardens of Potsdam ' is simply to give up all attempt to christianize our attitude. So again, apart from questions of compensation, we must not allow ourselves to think that ' the necessity of exacting a stern retribution for German crimes ' is a religious or Christian necessity. We have lately been warned not to content ourselves with making an abstraction called ' Germany ' and picturing it as a monster, but to remember that ' war is made not by tendencies and forces, but by men who, if they knew what was in each other's hearts, would never make it '.<sup>1</sup> And in any case the desire for retribution, however disinterested we may think it, and in however speciously religious a dress it presents itself, belongs to the old Adam in us and has nothing to do with the spirit of Christ. The text ' Vengeance is Mine ' is sometimes quoted, in this connexion, in a peculiarly unintelligent way. For, though much in it is obscure, the one thing it certainly means is that vengeance is *not ours*. The rôle of ' Scourge of God ' is not one to

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, October 22, 1914.

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which we need aspire just now. ‘ There are some among us now who preach hatred of the Germans to us ; and, in doing that, they are trying to make us what they themselves suppose the Germans to be.’<sup>1</sup>

We can at once apply our principles to conduct in our treatment of persons of German birth now in England. By all means let the authorities take whatever measures they think necessary for the safety of the country in the way of watching aliens, or even of concentrating and confining them within certain areas ! That is one thing. But for private individuals to treat all Germans as pariahs and to boycott them socially is quite another. This is cruel as well as unnecessary. It causes an extraordinary amount of mental suffering, especially to persons such as German governesses, who are, in any case, rather helpless and friendless. Again, it is quite indefensible, and a repudiation of all Christianity, for an Englishman to think that he is ‘ insulted ’ if he has to meet, at his club or on the golf links, persons of German birth, and to exert himself to get all such members excluded throughout the term of the war ; or, with the *Morning Post* of October 17, to call on all such persons, even when long naturalized, to respect our natural susceptibilities ‘ by judicious withdrawal from undue prominence in the political and social sphere of our national life ’. According to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,<sup>2</sup> ‘ a London newspaper the other day referred to the people who had subscribed to a fund for helping destitute German governesses, music masters, &c., as “ comforting the King’s enemies ”.’ He very naturally adds that such language is ‘ not

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, September 17.

<sup>2</sup> Writing in the *Daily Mail*, October 28.

patriotic but caddish', and that it is 'hurtful to our national reputation'.

It is an evil spirit that is abroad. It appeals partly to the base mob-instinct that leads men to join in harrying the unfortunate, and partly to the spirit of caste. There is here no question of national safety. No one supposes that the German-born golfer is spying while he is playing golf. It is merely that his very presence is felt to be an offence. So have Jews felt of Gentiles, aristocrats of the multitude, white men of coloured men, since the beginning of time. This spirit, which treats large classes of men *en masse* as 'unclean', is the very opposite of the spirit of Christian brotherhood. Wherever the Church of Christ has met it, it has had to fight it to the death.

There is no remedy for evil passions except good ones, —'the expulsive power of a new affection'. It is only into an empty house, swept and garnished, that the devils can easily enter. If we sincerely try to pray for Germany and the Germans our minds will have little room for harsh judgement, vindictiveness, or the spirit of persecution. If it seems to us as though, just now, some evil spirit had taken possession of the minds of the entire German people, distorting their judgement, narrowing their sympathies, and forcing their action into wrong channels, then all the more do they need our prayers. And—as has been truly said—'we can pray for those whom we hate; but we cannot hate those we pray for'.

#### PENITENCE AND HUMILITY

One of the strongest moral arguments against War is that it inevitably leads us into temptation. If we go to war, we deliberately put ourselves into a position

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of moral peril. I have already discussed the bearing of this on malice and hatred. But we are equally in peril of a very ugly kind of pharisaism. For we are bound to try to vindicate our cause before our own consciences and in the eyes of the world, and it is very difficult to do this without self-righteousness. We are forced to justify ourselves, and, in so doing, to be constantly comparing ourselves with the Germans to their disadvantage. But self-justification too easily turns into a self-applause which is unlovely and unhealthy. Too often during the last two months the refrain of our newspapers has seemed to be: 'God, we thank Thee that we are not as other men are, hypocrites, breakers of treaties, slayers of women and children, or even as this Kaiser.'

However much we are convinced, and however much we desire to convince others, that we do well to wage this war, there is, on any showing, quite enough in our national life and history that calls for penitence. Let us then be very sober in our self-satisfaction. We are most truly patriotic when we pray

For frantic boast and foolish word—  
Thy mercy on thy people, Lord !



# PAPERS FOR WAR TIME

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